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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KINSHASA 000350

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PHUM ASEC CG

SUBJECT: BUNDU DIA KONGO: A DANGEROUS INSURRECTIONIST
MOVEMENT

REF: A. KINSHASA 102

1B. KINSHASA 134
1C. KINSHASA 291

Classified By: PolOff CBrown, reasons 1.4 b/d.

11. (C) Summary: The Bundu dia Kongo (BDK) claims to defend the cultural and economic interests of the indigenous people of DRC's Bas-Congo province. The group is in reality a separatist sect with a long history of often violent confrontation with state security forces. End summary.

BDK AND NE MUANDA NSEMI

12. (U) The BDK, based in the DRC's western Bas-Congo province, is currently led by Ne Muanda Nsemi, a self-styled "spiritual leader" of BDK who serves as its ultimate authority figure and "prophet." Ethnic Kongo elders chose Nsemi to lead BDK in 1969 after he claimed to have had a spiritual "vision" from the movement's supreme being Akongo. Before his revelation, Nsemi was head of the laboratory at Kinshasa's General Hospital and a chemistry professor at the University of Kinshasa.

13. (SBU) Nsemi, who was elected as an independent to the National Assembly in July 2006, entered a political marriage of convenience with Jean-Pierre Bemba's MLC party during the January 2007 gubernatorial race in Bas-Congo, running for vice governor on a ticket with popular MLC politician Leonard Fuka Unzola as governor. Bemba's alliance had claimed a majority of seats in the provincial assembly, and Bemba himself won 75 percent of the presidential vote, in the October 2006 elections. The gubernatorial ticket's defeat by allies of President Joseph Kabil (ref A) triggered a 24-hour period of violence January 31-February 1 that left numerous dead (refs B and C). BDK adherents and many others in the province charged that the election had been compromised by corruption of the provincial assembly.

A RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL MOVEMENT?

14. (U) BDK professes to be a politico-religious movement and the cultural "guarantor" of the Kongo people. Unlike other provinces in the DRC, Bas-Congo is generally ethnically homogenous. Inhabitants of the province are mostly Bakongo, speaking dialects of the same Kikongo language, but are divided into several sub-groups. Most BDK adherents are found

in the western part of the province, in the towns of Muanda, Luozi and Lemba.

¶15. (SBU) BDK is not, however, an officially recognized Congolese political party, and Congolese officials contend BDK uses its religious status as a cover for violent activities. Nsemi ran as an independent candidate, and Independent Electoral Commission (CEI) officials in Bas-Congo said BDK candidates for the provincial assembly ran under the banners of regional political parties Congo-Pax and Abako. Several Bas-Congo officials have questioned the group's religious status, claiming BDK leaders have never produced any government documents recognizing their movement as a religion.

REAL OBJECTIVE: SECESSION

¶16. (U) BDK's primary objective is the creation of an independent ethnic Kongo kingdom in territories supposedly controlled by the Kongo people during the 15th century. This "kingdom" would encompass parts of modern-day Angola, the Republic of Congo, Gabon, and the DRC. GDRC authorities view the BDK not as a political or religious group but as an insurrectionist movement intent on secession. Some officials also claim the BDK wants to seize control of the country's oil resources in the Gulf of Guinea.

ADVOCATING VIOLENCE

¶17. (C) Bas-Congo security officials say BDK is a small but
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dangerous sect that advocates violence against "illegitimate" state authorities. Provincial officials estimate the group has about 100,000 followers in a province of nearly three million. Outgoing Governor Jacques Mbadu, who visited a BDK "camp" outside Matadi in December 2006, said the movement preaches violence, trains its members in using crude weapons such as clubs and machetes, and believes that fetishes and other "mystical powers" make members "invincible." He claimed BDK "churches," which are usually located far from population centers, serve as training camps for BDK's militia, known as "Makesa."

¶18. (C) Congolese military (FARDC) regional commander General Muyamba Nsiona said BDK instructs many of its members in the use of weapons and violence. He said he has visited several BDK sites in Bas-Congo, and showed PolOff during a recent visit to Matadi pictures of children in a BDK compound wearing military-style uniforms and brandishing sharpened sticks as rifles. Nsiona said many of the BDK compounds he has seen are run much like military installations, with a clear hierarchical command structure and stockpiles of machetes and similar weapons. Several other security officials contend BDK members are encouraged to consume drugs before confronting security forces.

¶19. (U) BDK members have frequently clashed with police and the military during demonstrations and political rallies, leading the GDRC to ban BDK activities at least twice, during both the governments of Mobutu and of Joseph Kabila. Police shot and killed 14 BDK demonstrators in Matadi in July 2002. Fighting broke out between BDK protesters and military forces in Matadi in June 2006, leaving several dead, including one soldier (refs B and C)

¶10. (C) Nsemi and BDK sympathizers portray the group as a victim of state oppression. Bas-Congo security officials, however, offer a different perspective. Nsiona claimed BDK supporters have killed more than 200 police officers in the last four years during demonstrations or through individually targeted murders. During the recent clashes, police in Muanda

said BDK followers attacked and killed four officers without provocation.

PLAYING ON XENOPHOBIA AND ECONOMIC FEARS

¶11. (U) BDK's propaganda, including tracts that circulated in the province before the February violence, calls for a "renewal" of the Kongo identity, playing on xenophobia and poor economic conditions. Dieudonne Kowelo, the administrator of Muanda territory (where BDK is very active), said the group advocates expelling all "non-natives" from positions of provincial authority, including military, police, parastatals and elected officials. He said BDK blames "external forces," including foreigners and Congolese not native to Bas-Congo, for exploiting the province. They believe the region has been marginalized by the central government which has not equitably returned profits from the province's ports and petroleum sector. According to BDK arguments, only by reclaiming Kongo's "independence" can the province realize the benefits of its resources.

¶12. (U) Nearly all Bas-Congo officials we met denounced the BDK. Matadi Mayor Jean-Marc Lukombo claimed his constituents are pleading with him to arrest Nsemi for supposedly orchestrating the February violence. He added that while many in the province are sympathetic to BDK's complaints about economic underdevelopment, few if any support the group's vision of the Kongo "kingdom" or its violence. Lukombo acknowledged the province requires significant investment, better infrastructure and more job opportunities but that violence is not the means to achieve those ends. Kowelo added that many in Muanda oppose BDK because they see its activities endangering the economic development the group demands.

COMMENT: SEEKING IMMUNITY FROM RELIION

¶1. (C) Comment: While Bas-Congo has suffered from declining living standards, this is a general problem throughout the DRC. Bantu dia Kongo's complaints of underdevelopment in Bas-Congo have little merit compared to the poor economic

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conditions in many of the country's other provinces. In fact, Bas-Congo is arguably one of the DRC's more well-off regions and has benefited from substantial government development thanks largely to its ports. The BDK is a movement intent on secession through almost any means necessary, including the use of force. Dealing with the BDK poses a unique challenge for the DRC, however, because the group has had some success in cloaking itself as a religious movement. The Kongo community has long been one of the most close-knit and well-organized of the DRC's ethnic groups, relatively successful in promoting their interests. The BDK builds on this sense of community, albeit in extremist form. The movement to create a Kongo "kingdom," however, seem to be largely a DRC phenomenon, and the BDK appears to enjoy little support among the Bakongo in neighboring countries. End comment.

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